

Nicholas County's First Settlers*

(Written in 1883 by Edward Campbell)

The first settlement of Peters creek and at Cross Lanes, then in Kanawha county, was made by Henry Morris, Conrad Young and Edward McClung. They made the start in 1791. Morris built a cabin near where Wm. B. Summers now resides and Young built near where Robert Neil now lives.

One day in the year 1792 Morris was out hunting on the waters of Otter creek; his dogs treed a bear, he shot it and divided it among his team of dogs and concealed himself in the thicket while the dogs were eating the bear meat. In a few minutes his dogs came to him with their bristles 'up'. Morris became alarmed and started for his cabin.—On reaching home his wife inquired if he thought it dangerous to send their children (two little girls) to drive the cows and calves up—(they kept the cows in one direction from house and the calves in another, not having any enclosure to keep them separated)—he thought not and the children started on their mission.

Morris left his gun at the house and went to the spring for water.—While at the spring his wife called and told him that the Indians were after or had killed their children. He found one of them who had been tomahawked and perhaps scalped; she was still alive and said a "yellow man had killed her." She was taken home where she soon died. The other child was killed and not found until the next morning. The children had gone near where two Indians were sitting by a "gnat smoke" and did not see them until too late to escape. The Indians were watching a path that led from Morris' to

*Editor's Note. The Nicholas Chronicle, Summersville, West Virginia, published on its editorial page in the issue of May 16, 1912 under the caption Nicholas County's First Settlers, the following:

"With this issue we begin publishing a series of articles which appeared in the Chronicle under the above caption in 1883 and a second time in 1892. We publish them a third time because of their historical worth and at the request of a number of our subscribers. They were written by Mr. Edward Campbell, one of the county's old and honored citizens, who died January 29th, 1896. These articles, twelve in all, cover the time from the earliest settlements up to the formation of the county in 1814, except that a chapter or two of the last volume were not among those published, which will leave a small gap unfortunately given to the formation of the county. One of these articles will appear next week until the twelve have been published."

"At the request of a number of the readers of West Virginia History and with the permission of Mr. Eustace J. Wiseman, owner and publisher of the Nicholas Chronicle, these articles are being re-published in the historical quarterly. The remaining ten will appear serially in the next three issues."

Young's cabin, and it is supposed that when night approached they intended to attack and destroy both families. Young was better prepared than Morris for an attack as he had two or three sons with guns ready for defense. The same day, Edward McClung, (who built his cabin near where D. R. Hamilton's barn now stands, at Cross Lanes,) and his associate Capt. George Fitzwater, were out hunting in different directions from McClung's cabin, they both heard shooting, and Fitzwater heard some one blow on his charger, which alarmed him and he hurried back to the cabin. When McClung came in that evening he told Fitzwater he had heard shooting in another direction. They became alarmed, as their only means of defense was their guns and a splendid team of bear dogs, and concluded to sit up and watch for the Indians that they might not be taken by surprise. Before mid-night, Mathias Young, who had traveled eight miles in the dark, through the woods, came to McClung's cabin and told of the massacre of the Morris children. The three men kept watch until near day-break, when they took McClung's wife and three children—each man carrying a child on his back—and started for Morris'. They traveled a zig-zag route through the woods and landed safe. They buried the children that day, and the next day all of the families left for the fort on Kanawha river, at the mouth of Hughes creek, where they arrived in safety.

The next day a company of men from the Fort started in search of the Indians who had murdered the Morris children. When they arrived at the Morris place they found no further sign or traces of the Indians; they next went to McClung's cabin and found the Indians had been there, and after having emptied his bed-tick of its contents, took the tick and two or three horses that had been sent there to graze in the savanna to keep them out of the way of the Indians, who had stolen horses near the Fort before. The company also found the trail of the Indians but as they had so much the start, further pursuit was abandoned and the company returned to the Fort.

Edward McClung remained in the Kanawha Valley and sold his land to Edward Hughes and John Campbell. The latter part of that year he was drowned in Kanawha river, near Moles Island, leaving a wife and three children—one boy and two girls. The oldest daughter became the wife of John

Groves, who lived and raised his family near Nicholas C. H. The other daughter married William Smithy, of Lewisburg, Greenbrier county. The boy's name was Edward. He lived and raised a family in Nicholas county, and died some years ago in Kentucky District. This ends the McClung family.

Morris and Young staid [sic] in Kanawha the remainder of the year 1792 and in 1793 they returned, with their families, to their home on Peters creek, and were not afterwards disturbed by the Indians, (the raid of 1792 being their last in this section.)

During this year, John Campbell moved a man by the name of John Harris and his family from the Kanawha river, who made a small improvement on the land bought of McClung. About this time Edward Hughes had some improvements made on the same land and some on a tract near by.

Thomas Hughes built a cabin and made a settlement on Laurel creek where Mr. Umbarger now resides; Daniel Huddleston improved the place where Mr. Bennett now resides; Henry Young made some improvements on Laurel creek, near where Bethel church is located; the Fort at the mouth of Hughes was built by a small party of men who came from Muddy creek, in Greenbrier county. Thos. Hughes, (who hailed from Prince William county, Va.,) who was a soldier in the Revolution and used to frontier life and hardships, was their leader. He died and was buried near the Fort in 1794. Thomas Smith married a daughter of Colonel Young in the Fort, and their first child was born there. John Campbell married Nancy Hughes in the Fort.

In 1705 [undoubtedly a typing error and should be 1795], the Indians having gone further west, and ceased their warfare in this section, and the people considering the danger over, vacated the Fort and started out in search of homes, the following parties coming to this part of the county to settle; Thomas Smith settled on E. Hughes' improvement, where Mrs. McCutcheon now resides; John Sherky, a single man; Edward Hughes settled on the improvement where John D. Groves now resides; Henry Young, Thos. Hughes and Daniel Huddleston had previously settled at the places named, and

John Campbell came to his improvement, made by John Harris. Henry Wornstaff was also one of the party.

Here they were—with no roads opened from the mouth of Rich creek, on Gauley river, and but little below; without mills and but very little grain. They went to work with a will to make a living for themselves and families. They built small huts to live in; their families were small and all had good health. Game was abundant and all who chose to hunt more open than now, and killing game was quite an easy task. As stock was scarce in the frontier settlements, they only started with a few cows, sheep and hogs. They bartered in fur and ginseng, which was plentiful at that time, and were a peaceable, happy and industrious people.

In 1798 a few more settlers came from Monroe or Greenbrier counties, who had originally come from Prince William county, Va., Isaac Foster and Robert Foster, (cousins,) both of whom had families. Isaac Foster settled on the farm formerly occupied by Thomas Smith—he having moved to 20 Mile creek. Isaac Foster had three grown sons, Isaac, Nathaniel and James. Isaac went West and was lost sight of; James married and settled where Henry Backus now lives. He remained there for some time, sold to Johnathan Dunbar and went to Ohio—from there to Indiana and was lost sight of.

After some time Isaac Foster, Sr., and his youngest son, Nathaniel, bought land in the Bend of Gauley and lived there until he died in 1814. Nathaniel Foster was married a long time before his father's death and continued to live in the Bend of Gauley, where he cleared out a large farm. By his first wife, he had two sons, John and Isaac. His oldest son John now lives near Cross Lanes and is doing well. Isaac married and went West and has been dead some time. By his second wife, Nathaniel had seven children, four girls and three boys. Two of the girls are dead, one, (Susan,) is a widow and Sarah, the youngest daughter, married D. R. Hamilton, Esq. of Cross Lanes. They have a pleasant and interesting family and are well provided with this world's goods.—Andrew B. Foster, his third son, lives on McKees creek,—he is a popular and influential citizen of the county, and was elected President of

the County Court, in 1880. Capt. R. G. Foster, his fourth son, lives near Cross Lanes. He is a good citizen, wide awake and full of fun.—James A. Foster, his fifth son, is one of the most prosperous farmers in Huerfano county, Colorado. Nathaniel Foster died at the age of 81 years.

Robert Foster, who was old when he came here, settled in the Bend of Gauley, and did not live long. His son William moved to Kentucky and was lost sight of. His son Bedford moved to Monroe county and afterwards went to the West. His daughter, Nellie, married Thomas Hughes,—had three children and died young.

II

I will commence by the settlement on Gauley River. It was made on the North side of the river, opposite the mouth of Rich creek, near the upper ford, on the route or trail from Greenbrier to the Kanawha Valley. This trail was made by Captains Lewis and Stuart as they went out with their companies to Point Pleasant, where the bloodiest and most decisive battle of the war was fought, on the 10th of October, 1773 (sic). By this route, they crossed Gauley river three times before they reached the mouth of 20 Mile creek. They camped at the mouth of Bell creek, and, that night—tradition says—Patric Murphy stole the bells off the horses and started them up 20 Mile creek. Next day the commanders sent a detachment of men in pursuit of the horses and when they returned they reported that they had gone up 20 miles; so that is the way 20 Mile got its name.

About the year 1797, Johnson Windsor cleared a piece of land and built a cabin near the ford, and made a canoe ("dug-out") to cross the river in, and on this trail the people who came from the East to settle in the State of Kentucky had to travel—this trail or pass-way to the Kanawha Valley, crossed Gauley Mountain from the head of Bell creek to the head waters of Hughes creek and down the stream to the Kanawha river.

John Johnson and family, consisting of two sons and five daughters, settled near Henry Morris', on Peters creek. They

all married and thus added several to the population on the creek.

Next came Jeremiah Odell, (who was a Revolutionary soldier,) and his brother, Sylvanus Odell, from Shendoah (sic) county, Virginia. They settled close together and continued there for some years. Sylvanus bought land of Capt. George Fitzwater, where Mr. Crookshanks now lives. He cleared out a good farm, planted an orchard and raised a large family.— He made a good living and died at a ripe old age. All of his family are now dead.

Jeremiah Odell was restless and wanted to be moving. He next went to 20 Mile creek and from there to McKees creek, near Nicholas C. H. I don't remember where his next place of residence was, but after some years he settled at Hughes' Ferry. From Hughes' Ferry he went to the Wilderness and settled near the old trail, leading to Greenbrier, about half-way to the settlement on Big Clear creek, where he remained for a time, but finding it difficult to live there, he returned to the Ferry. After some years he concluded to try the Wilderness again, moved back to the old home and continued there for many years and cleared out a large farm. His children were robust and industrious, and aided him in all his undertakings. He sold his farm to John Corran and moved to within six miles of the Ferry on the old trail, where he made another large improvement, and continued there until death. He was always cheerful in adversity as well as in prosperity.

One of his sons, Jeremiah, who was a Justice of our county for many years, still occupies the old homestead. The rest of the children who were furnished land 'in the woods,' settled here and there, and generally did well and made good citizens.

Henry Morris continued at his old settlement on Peters creek where he had cleared out a large body of land, until his death which occurred in 1824. Wm. Bird, who came from Bath county, married a daughter of Henry Morris'; lived there a while and moved back to Bath county. He finally returned; settled on Twenty Mile creek and in his after life went to Sycamore creek, now in Clay county, and there he and his wife both died.

Jesse James came to Peters creek from Bath county, Virginia; married another daughter of Henry Morris and settled on Otter creek, cleared out a large farm and continued there until his children were all grown up. In his old days he moved to Elk river above Charleston, where he and his wife both died. One of his daughters married Archy Price, who lived on Elk river. There were some marriages between the family of Henry Morris and that of Coonrod (sic) Young, but I can't remember all of them now. He had only one son, John, who lived close by his father, and continued with him and raised a large family, consisting of seven boys and five girls, all married and separated—some went West—but two remaining in this county. His father gave him the home farm and he remained on it as long as he lived, and divided it equally among his children, except one moiety, (sic) which he conveyed to his son Silas. He and his wife are both dead.

Coonrod (sic) Young, one of the pioneer settlers, had three wives and all had children—I have mentioned Mathias, Henry and Thomas Smith's wife. His son Charles was a good woodsman, a daring adventurer, and one of the best marksmen of his day. He could travel through the woods all day and return in safety to his camp at night.—I think he married a daughter of Henry Morris. His father took up no land on Peters creek, and he and his wife did not live long after the death of his parents. Their children moved to Elk river and did not return.

The next settler on Peters creek was Eleven Nicholas, who settled near Gilboa church, about the year 1798 or 1799. He and his son, Zephemiah, built the first mill on Peters creek. It was poorly constructed and did not do much good. Eleven returned to Virginia, but his family remained here. I believe he never owned any land.

About the time David Robinson, (who, perhaps, came here from Augusta county, Virginia, with a party of hunters, explorers and land surveyors,) had some improvements made on Hutchinson's creek. The explorers, who were here in Indian times, took up, entered and made surveys of land for themselves and friends, covering a large extent of this part of the county—some of the patents were dated in 1787-8. Robinson

moved his family here between the years 1795 and '98, and continued his improvements on Hutchinson's creek. He was a very intelligent and energetic man, had considerable money and a very intelligent family. One of his daughters married Mathias Van Bibber, who was here or came soon after or with him. Samuel Hutchinson, who was a land surveyor, and who came here after him, married another one of his daughters. Mr. Robinson lived here for several years, and being a shrewd land trader, went to the State of Kentucky on land speculation and never returned. His family remained here.

Mathias Van Bibber settled on Camp Fork, (where his son D. C. Van Bibber and Sebert now lives) and owned a fine farm. Here his wife died, and he afterwards married Margaret Hutchinson, and continued on his farm until all of his children were married and settled in life. He died in 1827. More will be said of him and Samuel Hutchinson in a future chapter.

Benjamin Lemasters came from Augusta County, Virginia, and settled on Bucks Garden creek, in 1798 or 1799. He had a large family consisting of ten daughters. They all married and raised families. Three were married to Boggsses; two Raders; one to James Robinson; one to Frame, one to Givens; one to Stephenson; and one to Campbell. Mr. Lemasters owned an excellent farm and said his girls were as good as boys to help him work. He made a good living and all of his girls married well. The old gentleman, his wife, and all of his daughters are now dead except one or two.

The next settler was Thomas Bails. He came from Montgomery county, Virginia, and settled where Col. J. G. Stephenson lived. He had four sons and several daughters. Three of his sons married and settled here, and one went West. One daughter married James Shirkey, who came out of the Fort on Hughes creek, one married Joseph Moore, one Daniel Haldy and another to James Nicholas. All of his children, but the one who went West, settled in this county. The old gentleman, after the death of his wife, wandered from place to place for a long time, but finally came back to his old home, where he died and was buried beside his wife.

Robert Martin who came with his family from Augusta county, Virginia, settled on Camp creek near T. Bails. He

cleared off a piece of land and built a mill, about the year 1805.—He remained here for some years, went away and was never afterwards heard of. His wife was an industrious woman and good manager, and succeeded well in raising her family, and accumulated some means. She bought the farm where C. K. Reynolds now lives and made a good living. She was married three times, her first husband was named Groves, by whom she had three children. (John Groves and two daughters, Robert and Samuel, and two daughters, Polly and Susan. After her children had all left home, she kept a boarding-house, where the Circuit Judge and lawyers all stopped, during court times—until accommodations were prepared at Summersville.

After our county was organized, the first courts were held in a small house on the John Groves farm.

(to be continued)